

**Before the
DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
NATIONAL TELECOMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION ADMINISTRATION
Washington, D.C. 20230**

In the Matter of)	
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)	
Development of the Nationwide)	Docket No. 120928505–2505–01
Interoperable Public Safety Broadband)	RIN 0660–XC002
Network)	
)	

COMMENTS OF COMPETITIVE CARRIERS ASSOCIATION

Competitive Carriers Association (“CCA”) respectfully submits these comments in response to the Notice of Inquiry (“*Notice*”) issued on behalf of the First Responder Network Authority (“FirstNet”) regarding the conceptual network architecture for the public safety broadband network and related considerations.¹ CCA represents the interests of more than 100 competitive wireless carriers, including many rural and regional carriers. Most of CCA’s members serve less than 500,000 subscribers. Many of these carriers provide robust mobile services in rural and hard-to-reach areas, and have infrastructure where the largest national carriers do not, particularly outside of large markets and off of interstate highways.

The nationwide broadband services envisioned in the creation of FirstNet demand that first responders have interoperable, nationwide broadband networks. First responders should accordingly be provided with *ubiquitous* service, including in rural, regional, remote and tribal areas, and with the capabilities to roam onto commercial networks and establish prioritization where appropriate. They should also be provided this access using technology and devices that leverage commercial wireless ecosystems and cost efficiencies. An approach that contemplates

¹ CCA was formerly known as RCA — The Competitive Carriers Association.

working in cooperation and coordination with as many commercial wireless carriers as possible is critical to accomplishing these goals.

CCA and its members have been leading advocates for ensuring interoperable use of broadband spectrum, especially the 700 MHz band, which to date has been plagued by non-interoperable band classes. In particular, CCA has noted that interoperability in the Lower 700 MHz band is crucial for competitive carriers and public safety agencies alike, as it will facilitate roaming for public safety users onto commercial broadband networks (and vice versa) and promote redundancy, improved service quality, and reduced equipment costs.

Consistent with those overarching objectives, CCA is encouraged that the FirstNet Nationwide Network proposal presented to the FirstNet Board of Directors on September 25, 2012 (“FNN Proposal”) discussed the importance of harnessing the physical expansiveness and resiliency of multiple wireless networks, including those operated by regional and rural carriers. CCA urges FirstNet to implement framework options that will accomplish its important goal of creating a diverse nationwide public safety network comprised of multiple wireless networks and systems that develops scale by operating across a common platform of devices, infrastructure, and services.

DISCUSSION

I. UNDERSTANDING STATE AND LOCAL PUBLIC SAFETY NEEDS IS ESSENTIAL, AND ROBUST COMPETITION AMONG COMMERCIAL PARTNERS, INCLUDING SMALLER BUSINESSES WELL VERSED IN LOCAL CONDITIONS, WILL BEST MEET LOCAL REQUIREMENTS

State, local, and tribal public safety officials – firefighters, police, emergency medical technicians, sheriffs, communications officers, state information officers, state, local and tribal political leaders, and other first-responders – represent the foundation of our nation’s public

safety infrastructure. The network that FirstNet develops must reflect the wisdom of those who we call upon to perform mission-critical public safety functions day in and day out. Among other things, state, local, and tribal officials can best identify priority deployment areas and the need for additional capacity. Therefore, while the concepts advanced in the *Notice* offer a compelling vision of an interoperable, ubiquitous communications infrastructure that public safety has long sought, FirstNet must assure that state, local, and tribal public safety officials remain fully and deeply engaged in the development of these proposals.

Although much work remains to be done to ensure FirstNet and state, local, and tribal officials engage constructively, these officials have long sought access to nationwide interoperable mobile broadband services. Critical to this stated need – and to the success of FirstNet – is offering first-responders a broadband service that is ubiquitous, resilient, and interoperable. Ubiquitous service must extend to all areas of the country, including rural, regional, remote and tribal areas. Resilient service should incorporate capabilities to establish prioritized communications across multiple networks while remaining attentive to the costs and form factors of devices. And interoperable service will require ensuring that every state and local public safety official has access to a common suite of services across a common platform of cutting-edge devices produced at scale and offered at common costs.

Achieving any of these goals will require FirstNet to leverage the combined capabilities of multiple commercial-sector partners. The unprecedented task at hand – deploying a nationwide interoperable broadband network that must operate with an exceptionally high degree of reliability and security – is too big to entrust to a sole source supplier or a single carrier vendor. No one manufacturer and no one wireless carrier can achieve these goals acting alone. To meet its responsibilities under the Middle Class Tax Relief and Job Creation Act of 2012 (the

“Spectrum Act”), therefore, FirstNet must remain attentive to the needs of state, local, and tribal public safety officials and then rely upon the innovation, value, agility and speed that competition among a diverse set of private sector competitors can provide.

In other words, FirstNet’s infrastructure must be interoperable, but it should not be monolithic. Both the information-gathering process and the competitive-bidding process should recognize the importance of working closely with state, local, and tribal officials to tailor the nationwide public safety broadband network to meet unique local requirements and missions. Smaller carrier operators, many of them well versed in the rural and remote communities FirstNet is charged with serving, stand ready to help meet that need.

II. CCA SUPPORTS FRAMEWORK OPTIONS THAT WILL CREATE A DIVERSE NATIONWIDE NETWORK WITH MULTIPLE WIRELESS NETWORKS AND SYSTEMS

The FirstNet Nationwide Network must leverage existing infrastructure and carrier resources to achieve Congress’s goals. Working with many different wireless providers, particularly service providers in remote, rural, and tribal areas, is necessary to achieve nearly ubiquitous network coverage. The challenges of delivering broadband communications services to rural areas of the country are well known, and the FNN Proposal appropriately recognizes that ensuring nationwide coverage will require partnerships with rural CMRS providers. Moreover, relying on multiple carrier networks will accelerate completion of a nationwide broadband public safety network. Indeed, by ensuring interoperability with regional and rural carriers’ broadband networks, FirstNet can give public safety users access to cutting-edge LTE services and devices as soon as compatible networks are deployed, without awaiting construction of separate network facilities.

Leveraging commercial network infrastructure will deliver several additional benefits. Critically, this approach will increase network redundancy and reliability. And taking advantage of the billions of dollars of network investment made by commercial carriers will lower immediate and long-term costs for FirstNet and public safety users. At the same time, working with multiple carriers will allow public safety users to continue the productive relationships they have with local wireless providers today. Finally, working directly with multiple commercial carriers will keep the public safety network on a comparable upgrade schedule as commercial networks, reducing the potential for interoperability issues that may arise due to different generations and releases of similar technology.

III. NATIONWIDE COVERAGE WITH MULTIPLE WIRELESS NETWORKS HINGES ON ACHIEVING INTEROPERABILITY IN THE LOWER 700 MHZ BAND

While CCA shares the multi-network vision underlying the FNN Proposal, ensuring interoperability in the Lower 700 MHz block is a vital prerequisite. As CCA has explained in comments filed with the FCC, Lower 700 MHz interoperability is essential to restoring investment and competition in the broadband wireless marketplace.² By the same token, the cost savings envisioned by the FNN Proposal from multiple networks and a robust device ecosystem will not be possible in rural areas without Lower 700 MHz interoperability. For example, absent such interoperability in the Lower 700 MHz band, public safety users would require an additional and unnecessary 700 MHz band class to access both AT&T's network and CCA members' networks. FirstNet should work with the FCC to eliminate such artificial barriers to accessing *all* LTE networks operating below 1 GHz. Interoperability should first be restored in

² See Comments of RCA — The Competitive Carriers Association, WT Docket No. 12-69 (filed June 1, 2012).

the Lower 700 MHz band, increasing efficiencies and opportunities for commercial and public safety users alike, and in the long term throughout the 700 MHz band as technologically reasonable in order to provide maximum utilization for all emergency responder users.

The lack of Lower 700 MHz interoperability will not only drive up the cost of devices that can access multiple networks but will also undermine the availability of roaming. The Technical Advisory Board for First Responder Interoperability has recommended that “[a] device that is capable of obtaining LTE ... service in certain bands shall operate on all FirstNet roaming partner LTE networks operating in those bands and not be locked to a subset of FirstNet roaming partner LTE networks operating in those bands.”³ But, absent interoperability, a device that operates on AT&T’s network *will* be locked to that network and effectively precluded from operating on the networks of CCA members. The result would be an inability to obtain roaming and priority access in many rural areas, contrary to Congressional intent and public safety needs.

CONCLUSION

FirstNet has the opportunity to create practical solutions as well as economic incentives to address non-interoperable device and network impediments to ubiquitous, multicarrier options for public safety users. CCA members would like to work with FirstNet on solutions through partnering with carriers at nationwide, state, and local levels. CCA encourages FirstNet to focus on leveraging the strengths of diverse commercial wireless networks, including rural and regional networks. That approach will deliver significant benefits to public safety users and will enable FirstNet to fulfill its critical statutory responsibilities. These critical benefits would be frustrated, however, without interoperability across the Lower 700 MHz band. Accordingly, NTIA should work with the FCC to ensure that Lower 700 MHz interoperability becomes a

³ Ex Parte Letter of the Technical Advisory Board for First Responder Interoperability, PS Docket 12-74 (June 19, 2012) (clarifying Recommended Requirement 15).

reality in the near future and work with multiple national, regional, and rural wireless carriers to successfully deploy a mobile broadband network for first responders.

Respectfully submitted,

/s/

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